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FILE ON

NICARAGUA-WHITE HOUSE
BY ROBERT PARRY
WASHINGTON

President Reagan's national security adviser Thursday assured two key senators that White House officials neither gave military advice to Nicaraguan rebels nor solicited private aid after last year's congressional ban on "direct or indirect" U.S. support.

Sens. Dave Durenberger, R-Minn., Senate Intelligence Committee chairman, and Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., the panel's vice chairman, said they received that assurance from national security adviser Robert McFarlane during a one-hour meeting.

McFarlane was responding to published reports that Lt. Col. Oliver North, a staff aide to Reagan's National Security Council, had helped the Nicaraguan rebels raise money from outside sources and provided some military advice.

In a statement, the two senators quoted McFarlane as saying: "No NSC staff member either personally assisted the (Nicaraguan) resistance or solicited outside assistance on their behalf.

"At no time did anyone act as a go-between or focal point for such aid," they quoted him as saying.

Durenberger and Leahy, however, said the intelligence committee would conduct a review of the issue and voiced "concern about the potential for the NSC to fill the gap when Congress had prohibited a different branch of government from a specific activity."

The House Intelligence Committee and a subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee are also conducting reviews.

The Associated Press reported last June that White House officials, including North, advised private groups that were trying in the spring of 1984 to set up fund-raising efforts to support the rebels fighting to oust Nicaragua's leftist government.

However, the strict ban against "direct or indirect" aid to the rebels from the CIA or other U.S. agencies involved in intelligence did not take effect until Oct. 1, 1984 and officially expires on Sept. 30.

Other published reports have claimed that North has been involved in some rebel activities and assisted in some private fund raising, but administration officials have consistently denied any violation of the congressional ban.

Durenberger and Leahy said McFarlane agreed that the congressional ban would have applied to the NSC staff. But the NSC adviser said Reagan had specifically directed the White House staff to comply with the prohibition, the senators said.

"We were assured there was no intent to circumvent restrictions Congress placed on aid to the Nicaraguan resistance," the senators said.

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Durenberger added that McFarlane had said that "neither he nor anyone else had in any way initiated the collecting of funds, the collecting of arms or had helped to channel any of these things in any specific direction."

But Durenberger said North did maintain contacts with Americans who wished to assist the rebels and with the rebels themselves.

"You can certainly do your best to keep (up) the morale of our friends - the Nicaraguan opposition - until we can change the position of the Congress," the senator said, explaining the administration's position.

Durenberger said North "did not deny responding to phone calls (from people who) would call and say, 'I'd like to ... help these guys out, and he would say, in effect, 'You know who they are, but we can't tell you what to do.'"

This summer, Congress continued a ban on lethal military aid to the Nicaraguan rebels but approved \$27 million in non-lethal aid and agreed to permit the CIA to share intelligence information with the rebels.